

# **AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: THE TURKISH CASE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE POSITION OF SENIOR CITIZENS**

**Fahri ERENEL**

Istanbul Kemerburgaz University, Department of International Logistics Management, Istanbul, Turkey

[fahri.erenel@kemerburgaz.edu.tr](mailto:fahri.erenel@kemerburgaz.edu.tr)

## **Abstract**

*The subject of diversity has increasingly been emphasized in recent human resource management literature since changing demographics make it more important to select, retain and manage a diverse workforce. However it is also seen that there are relatively few researches which examine the position of senior citizens in terms of diversity within an organizational setting. This study aims to examine the position of senior citizens, who proceed to work after his/her retirement; whether they are considered as a source of diversity and treated in this way in Turkey. First of all it is found that Turkish population gets older in contrast to general opinion. Now there are certain initiatives to take necessary precautions in terms of employability of senior workforce but these initiatives are lack of monitoring systems and thus, whether these seniors are recognized as a source of diversity, handled with extensive care and to what extent they fit in the existing workplace environment and whether they become successful or failure to accommodate themselves are the questions that remain unanswered. Therefore there is an urgent need for a comprehensive monitoring system and in this way both success and failures of senior citizens can be noticed and responded on time. Also updating the current programs and course contents of diversity management trainings according to new parameters such as senior workforce, health behaviours or social interaction would be an applicable solution.*

**Keywords:** *Diversity, Diversity Management, Human Resources Management, Management and Organization, Senior Citizens*

## INTRODUCTION

As it is previously pointed out by Nkomo and Cox, while evaluating the first decade of diversity research in 1996, it is seen that most studies examined the effects of diversity but failed to define the notion of diversity properly. Their plea for more theoretically sound approaches has taken a considerable attention. The subject of diversity and diversity management as a discourse has been studied by several researchers. They examined the origin of the new discourse of diversity (Jones et al. 2000; Kelly and Dobbin, 1998) in a critical manner, and how it is applied in organizations (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004), implemented in professions (Litvin, 2002), and broader institutional settings (Dandeker and Mason, 2001; Wilson and Iles, 1999). These studies have made significant contributions to the diversity management literature. First, they have presented that demographic characteristics are rather socially constructed. Second, they presented how the rhetoric of diversity has a positive, empowering discourse by emphasizing the different capacities of individuals (Thomas and Ely, 1996) and showing how diversity discourses function as control mechanisms.

Diversity inclines to change its extent and priorities according to industry, regional context or business needs. The term of diversity refers to the “so-called core dimensions of diversity (as often used by companies) i.e. differences in age / generations, ability / disability (physical, mental), ethnicity / race / cultural and migrational background, gender, religion / belief / world view and sexual orientation / identity / gender expression” (European Commission, 2012).

When we look at the present situation, it could clearly be seen that more and more companies are inclined to adapt proactive programmes to manage diversity and inclusion as a part of their human resource or business strategies. Organizations have started to generate their specific terms to manage diversity. As a result, there will be a need to identify common concepts related to the concrete corporate activities.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the position of senior citizens as an increasing part of workforce due to aging population worldwide; whether they are considered as a source of diversity and motivated according to this approach in Turkey. To what extent organizations may benefit from these people’s experiences is also questioned within the scope of this study.

## DIVERSITY AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Diversity is defined as an evolving concept in literature because it is accepted both as specific in terms of focusing on individual and contextual and being defined through societal constructs (Moore, 1999). Recent studies point out diversity as a significant difference that distinguishes

one individual from another; “a description that encompasses a broad range of overt and hidden qualities” and researchers generally examine diversity characteristics as four separate areas: personality (e.g. skills and abilities), internal (e.g. gender, race, IQ), external (e.g. culture and religion), and organizational (e.g. position, department)” (Kreitz, 2007; Digh, 1998; Simmons-Welburn, 1999). According to Thomas (1992), in order to to manage diversity successfully managers and leaders should broaden their perspectives on diversity and include other dimensions such as age, cultural background as well. In his model, workplace diversity management is also defined as a “comprehensive managerial process for developing an environment that works for all employees” (1992, p.10).

Workplace diversity is considered a serious issue because it affects the organizational outcomes. For instance, an organization may define diversity as regulatory compliance or social justice (McMahon, 2006). We can summon the diversity outcomes of an organization under five major categories:

- “Complying with federal and state requirements,
- Expecting and rewarding homogeneity,
- Identifying diversity as a broad goal without accompanying changes,
- Identifying discrete diversity goals and creating selective organizational changes to achieve them,
- Pursuing systemic and planned organizational change to take optimum strategic advantage of diversity” (Kreitz, 2007; Hastings, 2006).

Diversity management can be defined as a managerial method whereby employers recognise value and include both genders of different ages, religion, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or abilities and it would increase the performance of an organization. The European Commission refers diversity management as a “part of the business world’s strategic agenda as a response to a more diversified society, customer base, market structure and overall business environment and workforce where knowledge and innovation are critical in securing competitive advantage in a globalised economy” (2012).

## **DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AND SENIOR (65 +) WORKFORCE**

In literature it is pointed out that HR directors encounter with a serious challenge in managing organizational diversity. Managing this challenge requires executive management commitment, the skilled training and breadth of organizational knowledge. It is also necessary to have a shared understanding that diversity may not constitute a problem if it is managed in a successful way and it is an ongoing process. These components are significant in terms of ensuring and

sustaining people's willingness to work together even if they do not share experiences, culture and values (Zane, 2002).

Researchers assert two reasons why implementing diversity in a workplace environment is difficult. The first reason is individuals prefer working in homogeneous groups. The second is they generally tend to avoid and resist change (Basset-Jones, 2005; Cox, 2011; Galagan, 1993). A successful diversity management process requires HR managers to possess leadership, being good at change management, psychology, communication, organizational development and assessment skills. These cross-cutting skills may seem broadly useful to the success of any business initiative but if an organization wants to create a change and grow its profit, employees of this organization need to learn how they could interact (Kreitz, 2007). As a result of aging population worldwide, senior workforce demands more attention as a source of organizational diversity.

Examining the aging experience from multiple perspectives enables us to develop an understanding of human development and recognize the facts that aging is universal indeed (Jackson, 1989). While studying basic processes and mechanisms, the previous researches on aging note that including participants from different ethnic groups, genders and social classes is conveniently available to researchers. However, as it has been previously implied by Mehrotra and Wagner (2009), "race, gender, culture and ethnicity are not merely independent variables defining group membership and structural position but instead more fundamentally may influence basic psychological processes of perception, cognition, intellectual functioning, health behaviours and social interaction". Aging research enables us being pluralistic in our diversity research orientation and contributes to diversity literature by broadening our conceptualization and methods according to this point of view.

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND FINDINGS**

Academic publishing, current projects, legal implementations and reports on both aging and diversity management have been examined in this study. For the study purpose secondary data is used. The obtained data is analyzed by the methods of document and discourse analysis. Applicable solutions to manage and motivate senior citizens are tried to be put forth in conclusion part of the study.

In 1997, subsequent to the reports published by OECD (1988) and the World Bank (1994), US Department of Health and Human Services wrote a paper on active aging aiming at activating older people both in work and social life. Creating a productive aging population became an international subject for the first time. Thereafter, OECD maintains its mission to promote active aging reforms by editing a thematic analysis of 21 countries and it reaches to the

decision that active aging is “far too inclusive to be a manageable theme for international monitoring and sharing experiences” by 2000. It could be said that the significance of senior (65 +) citizens as a source of experienced workforce started to be recognized.

Recent demographic projections point out that the majority of workforce in America and Europe will consist of women, minorities and senior citizens in near future. In order to have competitive advantage, 44 percent of 34 international corporations indicate that the main reason behind their diversity management trainings is to capture different markets and different types of customers. For instance Alpine Bank employees bilingual employees to target Spanish market (Dass and Parker, 1996). Although the subject of “age” is emphasized as a part of diversity management and aging is accepted as a universal matter, how senior citizens are managed and motivated within an organizational setting, how the term of active aging would be integrated into diversity trainings and whether there are new initiatives or strategies to utilize these experienced people remain unanswered. When the documents published by the European Commission and the United Nations are analyzed, it could be clearly seen that the social aspects of being a senior and necessary precautions to integrate these people into social life is portrayed in detail. However, the dimensions related to their work life still need to be enhanced.

When the present condition of Turkey is examined, it is seen that Turkey has expressed her objective as being ranked among the world’s 10 economies but in contrast to general acceptance its population gets older according to latest researches. As it is pointed out in a former study, as the aging population tends to lower both saving rates and labor force participation, it raises the concerns about a future slowing of economic growth (Bloom et al., 2011). When the current legal implementation is examined, it could be said that Turkey has recognized the significance of senior workforce as its population gets older and started to take certain precautions to benefit from their experiences. However, according to the data of Turkish Job Recruitment agency, only 320 of 3195 seniors were employed in 2012. National Action Plan on Aging (2007) is developed to ensure that senior citizens participate in decision making processes of society and development. Also creating employment opportunities for them was intended. At this point, there have been certain initiatives which recognize senior citizens as a source of diversity and try to employ and manage them properly but whether these initiatives are successful and which types of precautions would be taken are discussed in conclusion part.

## CONCLUSION

As it is pointed out by the current researches on human resource management, today’s managers are responsible for both leading and responding to the needs of employees as well as customers who are more culturally diverse, older and in greater need of child and elder care.

From this point of view, it could be said that the issue of diversity is positively embraced by HR academicians and practitioners in contrast to previous practises. Leaders both in the public and private sectors increasingly pay more attention to diversity related issues. Whether the goal is to be an employer of choice, to provide excellent customer service, or to maintain competitive edge, diversity has been recognized and utilized as an important organizational resource. Hence, training programs are reorganized according to that perspective.

A recent survey which has been conducted by Akdeniz University and the Scientific Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), emphasizes the fact that Turkish population gets older in contrast to general opinion (TUIK, 2012). From this point forth, when the existing literature on aging is examined, it is seen that the main focus the researches and reports is establishing new policies which prevent the loss of experienced human resource by enabling increase in employability and career transition while societies get older and work population decreases. Turkish Ministry of development published “National Action Plan on Aging” in 2007 in order to take necessary precautions in terms of employability of senior workforce and determining long term objectives including this source of diversity within that scope.

In this way, senior citizens are ensured to participate in decision making processes of society and development, employment opportunities are created for them, the life standards of seniors living in countryside are also tried to be improved. Moreover, the subjects of how to benefit from the experiences of those people and how they would be employed and managed are opened to discussion. Also a comprehensive platform was formed in line with these developments. However, these initiatives are lack of monitoring systems and thus, whether these seniors are recognized as a source of diversity, handled with extensive care and to what extent they fit in the existing workplace environment and whether they become successful or fail to accommodate themselves are the questions that remain unanswered.

First of all a comprehensive monitoring system should be formed and in this way both success and failures of senior citizens can be noticed and responded on time. Secondly, the current programs and course contents of diversity management trainings need to be updated according to new parameters such as senior workforce, health behaviours or social interaction needs.

Moreover, in order to benefit from the experiences of 60 + people, rather than employing them in a totally different workplace, sustaining the relations between these people and their previous workplaces might be an applicable solution. Last but not least, the Lifelong Learning Projects, such as Grundtvig Projects supported by the European Union have certain significance in terms of socializing and motivating seniors and the contents of these projects

could be extended to include diversity management within an organizational setting. Also a community might be created under which they could gather and actively take part in labor force in times of need.

## REFERENCES

- Dandeker, C., Mason, D. (2001). 'The British Armed Services and the Participation of Minority Ethnic Communities: From Equal Opportunities to Diversity?'. *The Sociological Review*, 49, 219-33.
- Dass, P., Parker, B. (1996). Diversity: A Strategic Issue. In E.E. Kossek and S.A. Lobel (eds.), *Managing Diversity. Human Resource Strategies for Transforming the Workplace*, Oxford, England: Blackwell, 365-391.
- Digh, P. (1998). "Coming To Terms With Diversity". *HR Magazine*, 43(12), 117, 3.
- D. E. Bloom, A. Boersch-Supan, P. Mcgee, A. Seike (2011). "Population Aging: Facts, Challenges, and Responses", Harvard Initiative For Global Health, Pdga Working Paper No. 71.
- European Commission (2012). *Implementation Checklist for Diversity Management (Support for Voluntary Initiatives Promoting Diversity Management at the Workplace across the EU)*, Retrieved April 5, 2015, from [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/checklist\\_diversitymanagement\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/checklist_diversitymanagement_en.pdf).
- Hastings, R.R. (2006). "An Inclusive Workplace: How To Know One When You See One". Retrieved December 20, 2014, From [Http://Www.Shrm.Org/Diversity/Library\\_Published/Nonic/CMS\\_019237.Asp](Http://Www.Shrm.Org/Diversity/Library_Published/Nonic/CMS_019237.Asp).
- Jackson, P. (1989). *Maps of Meaning: an Introduction to Cultural Geography*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Jones, D., Pringle, J. Shepherd, D. (2000). "Managing Diversity Meets Aotearoa / New Zealand". *Personal Review*, 29, 364-80.
- Kelly, E. Dobbin, F. (1998). "How Affirmative Action Became Diversity Management". *American Behavioral Scientist*, 41, 960-84.
- Kreitz, P. A. (2007). "Best Practices for Managing Organizational Diversity", SLAC-PUB,12499, Retrieved April, 5, 2015 from <http://www.slac.stanford.edu/cgi-wrap/getdoc/slac-pub-12499.pdf>.
- Litvin, D. (2002). 'The Business Case For Diversity And The 'Iron Cage'.' In Czarniawska, B. And Höpfl, H. (Eds.), *Casting The Other: The Production And Maintenance Of Inequalities in Work Organizations*. London: Routledge.
- McMahon, A.M. (2006). *Responses To Diversity: Approaches And Initiatives*. Retrieved December 20, 2014, From [http://Www.Shrm.Org/Hrresources/Whitepapers\\_Published/CMS\\_017028.Asp](http://Www.Shrm.Org/Hrresources/Whitepapers_Published/CMS_017028.Asp).
- Mehrotra, M. C., Wagner, L. S. (2009). *An Active Learning Experience*. Taylor & Francis Group, New York.
- Moore, S. (1999). "Understanding And Managing Diversity Among Groups At Work: Key Issues for Organizational Training and Development". *Journal Of European Industrial Training*, 23, 208–217.
- Nkomo, S, Cox, T. Jr. (1996). "Diverse Identities in Organizations". In Clegg, S., Hardy, C. and Nord, W. (Eds), *Handbook of Organization Studies*. London: Sage.
- OECD (1988). "Ageing Populations". *The Social Policy Implications*. Paris, France.
- Republic Of Turkey Ministry Of Development (2007). "Türkiye'de Yaşlıların Durumu Ve Yaşlanma Ulusal Eylem Planı" (National Action Plan On Aging).
- Simmons-Welburn J. (1999). "Diversity Dialogue Groups: A Model For Enhancing Work Place Diversity". *Journal Of Library Administration*, 27, 111-121.
- T.C. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK) (2012). "Seniorswith Statistics", Ankara.
- Thomas, D. A., Ely, R.J. (1996). 'Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm For Managing Diversity'. *Harvard Business Review*, September-October, 79-90.

Thomas, R.R., Jr. (1992). "Beyond Race And Gender: Unleashing The Power Of Your Total Work Force By Managing Diversity". New York: AMACOM.

TUBITAK, Retrieved April 5, 2015, from <http://www.geroatlas.com/support.html>.

Wilson, E., Iles, P. (1999). 'Managing Diversity – An Employment And Service Delivery Challenge'. *International Journal Of Public Sector Management*, 12, 27-48.

World Bank (1994). "Averting The Old Age Crisis". New York: Oxford University Press.

Zanoni, P. Janssens, M. (2005). "Diversity Management as Identity Regulation in the Post-Fordist Productive Space. Where Organization Dwells: a One Day Symposium on Organization, Space and Architecture". University of Warwick (UK), May 23.

Zane, N.C. (2002). "The Glass Ceiling Is The Floor My Boss Walks On: Leadership Challenges In Managing Diversity". *The Journal Of Applied Behavioral Science*, 38, 334-354.